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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by Leonard Cheshire Disability, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2008/1.

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Statement

A worldwide partnership

1. Leonard Cheshire Disability International (an organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council) is a truly global organization working in 54 countries on six continents. We support over 250 independently managed organizations working with disabled people and their families. Together we reach people of all ages of diverse backgrounds and with many different kinds of disabilities.

2. With 60 years of experience, we promote inclusive development – people with disabilities are central to every stage of our projects. All of this is supported by our disability and development research team at University College London and our commitment to testing and spreading good practice. To help bring disability issues to the top of national and global agendas, we also campaign for the human rights of people with disabilities.

3. Our programme areas include:

(a) Education;

(b) Livelihoods;

(c) Health and rehabilitation;

(d) Support for everyday living;

(e) Research;

(f) Campaigning.

An Inclusive Approach to Employment and Poverty Reduction

4. Combating poverty requires a multisectoral, multiactor and consultative approach. The involvement of disabled people in this process cannot be left to goodwill: it must be strategized. A two-track approach is necessary in which both mainstreaming and special focus programmes are implemented. Disabled peoples' organizations have a crucial role in this process at all levels.

5. Disabled people start with a major disadvantage in employment: low expectations in society and sometimes in themselves. Economic empowerment programmes need to find strategies for breaking out of this vicious circle. Empowerment is evident in disabled people who are concerned for the well-being of others as well as themselves, and they can be used as role models in training programmes.

6. An understanding of the economic and social context is vital when planning economic empowerment programmes. The vast majority of working people, including disabled people, in

developing countries work in the informal economy. Jobs and employment are not necessarily useful concepts in rural areas that are dependent on subsistence agriculture. In such areas, economic empowerment programmes need to look for ways in which disabled people can contribute to family income, especially through agriculture.

7. Skills are vital for access to work in urban areas, but must be interpreted more widely than technical skills alone. Competencies include attitudes, knowledge and skills. Training needs to be seen holistically and include lifelong learning and learning by experience.

8. Leonard Cheshire Disability's own programmes recognize that people work in many different ways and include:

(a) Small loans to start businesses;

(b) Training in running the business;

(c) Vocational training;

(d) Making workplaces more accessible;

(e) Promoting the employment rights of disabled people.

9. It is impossible to look at employment alone as a cause of poverty. A key factor in the cause of poverty is, of course, lack of access to education. In many developing countries, over 90 per cent of disabled children do not attend school. Inclusive education offers a solution. By working with local schools, they can be made more accessible, welcoming environments that meet all their students' needs and help to dissolve prejudices among fellow pupils.

10. The year 2007 was not only the mid-way point in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it was also the year in which the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was opened for signature (30 March 2007). Leonard Cheshire Disability believes that with the high profile given to disability by the Convention, now is the perfect time to make disability a cornerstone of the MDGs. Without addressing disability exclusion, the MDGs will not meet their goals.

11. If done properly, the ratification and implementation of the Convention could bring about a sea change in the daily experiences of people with disabilities around the world. This is why advocacy by people with disabilities themselves is so important. Our Young Voices project (active in over 13 countries around the world and involving over 250 young people) is working with groups of young people with disabilities to help them explore how by working together they can use the Convention to fight for their rights. Under this project, groups of young people with disabilities are actively advocating and campaigning for their own rights in countries as diverse as Sri Lanka and Sudan. This is opening the door to tomorrow's leaders.